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ABSTRACT

This brief report summarizes a longer document with the same title. It reviews the reshaping of the college undergraduate curriculum in order to meet the new and compelling issues of the future such as accommodating diverse races and ethnic groups, incorporating global perspectives on the environment, and dealing more effectively with the human dimensions of education. It is suggested that a firmer grasp is needed on what the curriculum is as an idea, and what language and terminology can best describe it and give it operational definition. Further suggested is a careful review of the criticisms, and recommendations that confront the collegiate curriculum. There is also a need for a continuous self-analysis dealing with what the academic profession is and what its condition of practice should be. Finally, a need exists for a wider understanding of the organization and its content, going from a preparation stage to an action phase that recognizes the shape of change and the forces of culture within which it moves. Contains 10 selected references. (GLR)

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Meeting the Mandate: Renewing the College and Departmental Curriculum

William Toombs and William Tierney

In the grain and chaff of criticism and analysis that have fallen on colleges and universities in the past decade are several new and compelling issues. To accommodate diverse races and ethnic traditions and both genders, to incorporate global perspectives on the environment and exchange among nations, and to deal more effectively with the human dimensions of the educational equation are distinctive challenges. Bound into the fabric of the larger society by their importance and complexity, they take on the qualities of mandates. For education, these contemporary demands differ in essential ways from the press of new knowledge or the expansion of the business and professional sectors, drivers of the 1970s and 1980s. They transcend the disciplines without diminishing their value and introduce considerations that have not been faced before in their full complexity.

Why is Curriculum Change Important?

Even though other sectors of society share the mandates--political policy makers, leaders in the justice system, and managers in corporate practice, for example--it is in the undergraduate curriculum that many of the issues come together for academics. It is important to recognize that the collegiate experience has its own dimensions and its own functions. In the fullest sense, the curriculum is intended to serve all students by means of an experience that has enough unity to sustain a common discourse among the best trained and educated. If students are to be in tune with a world few of their mentors have known, the course of study will have to be changed in fundamental ways still to be determined, discovered, or made.

What is the Curriculum?

The curriculum is an act of collective response by a collegiate faculty. It is an expression of intellectual accountability as a faculty to external factors--society's expectations and changes in knowledge--and to internal factors, such as students' needs. That response might be imaginative or creative, merely pedestrian, or even servile. At its best, it is the product of an independent reading by an academic community of what is needed at a particular time and an educational expression of that need.

What is studied, how, and why must be constructed and reconstructed from the interplay of the academy and the world outside. History and philosophy provide only breadth and insight, not direct guidance. The fundamental accountability of academics is for the way they translate the forces at work in that larger world into the substance of the collegiate curriculum--in short, where they stand.

Therefore, the term "curriculum" is reserved for an institution's entire educational program. It is the locus of corporate responsibility for learning that engages faculty, trustees, administration, and students. The curriculum encompasses all the sectors of the institution involved with the process of teaching and learning.

What Are the Forces of Change and Renewal?

A multitude of well-publicized books and articles criticized different aspects of the curricular experience and called for a multitude of changes in the academic curriculum. These reports address three major questions about the curriculum:

1. How much of the curriculum should be prescribed, and how much should be left to students' choice?
2. What is the best way to achieve breadth in a student's education?
3. How does one teach students to synthesize what they have learned?

The responses to these reports were almost as voluminous as the reports themselves. An analysis of the reports and commentaries offered seven questions that pervade the discussions of curriculum reform:

1. Who is to decide the curriculum of schools and colleges in a democratic society?
2. To what extent should students be involved in planning and developing the curriculum?
3. What are the relative rights and responsibilities of teachers within schools and of society outside schools?
4. What is the meaning of the liberal arts in undergraduate programs?
5. What is the purpose and function of general education?
6. What are the specific benefits and advantages that accrue to the college graduate upon the completion of program and degree requirements?

7. What is the particular significance and meaning that can be attached to a college education in an era of universal education?

These questions have roots in the enduring traditions of debates about curriculum in American society and provide the foundation for a discussion about alternative curricular analysis.

What Are the Different Approaches of Analyses?

A review of analysis of curricula categorizes them in terms of very special purposes--administrative review for new courses, self-study, committee analysis, board intervention and comparative study--but contains little evidence of "theory" in action. This idiosyncratic approach to such analysis is still widely evident. The practice has serious shortcomings, however, in that it chops the total curriculum into pieces offering momentary convenience but results that are rarely consistent from one setting to another and seldom congruent with each other.

What is advocated is a different view. Analysis of the curriculum, for whatever purpose, at whatever level, is a critical feature of the practice situation in the academic profession. It follows that such analysis should follow sound organizing principles, principles consonant with academic conditions. The established professions have elaborated design into context, content, and form. The concept offers a defining principle very appropriate to the teaching-learning situation.

Changes in the curriculum to meet contemporary challenges are made in one of three ways: (1) modification or reform, the most familiar; (2) integration, perhaps the most difficult; and (3) transformation, a type of change that responds to complexity and uncertainty.

How Do You Approach Transformation Change?

The process of transformation has two distinct components. The first is exploration by *systematic analysis*, the second action for *organizational change*. It follows, therefore, that programs for changing the curriculum to meet the challenges of today are best conceived as a two-stage process. Each stage is a discrete operation.

Finally, the management of transforming change in the curriculum brings to the fore a pronounced need for wider understanding of the organization and its content. Together these factors point toward a two-stage process for opening curricular change to the mandates. The preparatory stage emphasizes legitimization of substance and method, exploration to generate understanding, and negotiation. Then the central task becomes one of moving to action in ways that recognize the shape of change and the forces of culture within which it moves.

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